United Nations S/2001/848

Security Council

Distr.: General
6 September 2001
English
Original: French

Letter dated 5 September 2001 from the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations addressed to the President of the Security Council

As directed by the Secretary-General, I have the honour to refer to the letter from the Permanent Representation of Israel to you, dated 28 August (S/2001/831), drawing attention to certain developments in South Lebanon, in particular the situation in the Ghajar/Abbasiyeh area. I wish to provide some clarifications on the actions taken to date by the United Nations on this matter and to address the requests made by the Permanent Representative.

At the outset, it should be recalled that the Secretary-General in his report to the Security Council dated 22 January 2001 (S/2001/66), indicated that since the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) "no longer exercises any control over the area of operation". Neither does UNIFIL maintain checkpoints, nor has it done so since the drawing of the Blue Line. As the Council reaffirmed in resolution 1365 (2001), UNIFIL carries out its functions through mobile patrols and observation from fixed positions and through close contacts with the parties to correct violations, resolve incidents and prevent the escalation of incidents. The establishment of fixed positions is based on operational considerations and should not be dictated by the parties.

In the vicinity of Ghajar, UNIFIL has a position known as 4-28, approximately one and a half kilometres east of the village. During the period this position was under construction, UNIFIL was temporarily storing containers about two hundred metres away by a gate in the old technical fence on the road leading to the abandoned village of Abbasiyeh. The construction of 4-28 was completed and the containers were removed on 4 August 2001. At no time did these containers constitute a position or, as asserted by Israel, a checkpoint. While the containers were an obstacle to the road to Ghajar, they did not by any means prevent or control all access to the road, nor were they intended to prevent Lebanese access to Lebanese land.

The village of Abbasiyeh, the road leading to Ghajar and the entire surrounding area are clearly on the Lebanese side of the Blue Line.

The United Nations was key to the establishment of the "status quo" in Ghajar village, and is endeavouring to maintain it. UNIFIL and the other United Nations representatives in the region have worked actively to maintain that arrangement when it appeared that actions by either party could result in destabilization of the situation. In this most recent period, the office of the Special Coordinator, the office

01-52904 (E) 060901 060901

of the Personal Representative and the UNIFIL command have engaged in concerted efforts at the diplomatic and military levels with Lebanese and Israeli authorities to restore stability and avert conflict. There have been, however, no "understandings" reached with Israeli officials — United Nations officials have simply seen fit, for the sake of international peace and security, to inform their Israeli interlocutors of various avenues that might be pursued with the Lebanese authorities.

The initiatives at the political level combined with UNIFIL efforts on the ground (including assertive UNIFIL patrolling by armoured personnel carriers and close contact with the villagers and other local Lebanese) were able to bring about a decrease in provocative activity resulting in reduced tension. As of last week, the situation had improved significantly, fostering conditions on the ground that might allow a return to the status quo.

The United Nations is continuing to keep a close watch on the situation in the Ghajar/Abbasiyeh area and will promptly take any necessary further steps with its Lebanese and Israeli interlocutors to pre-empt possible inflammatory incidents. However, though UNIFIL, through its presence, is often in a position to play an important deterrent role, the fact that its actions here as elsewhere are necessarily governed by its mandate should not be overlooked. Primary responsibility for preventing deterioration of any situation along the Blue Line rests with the parties, who are obligated by the decisions of the Security Council to cooperate fully with the United Nations and UNIFIL.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Jean-Marie **Guéhenno**
Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations